

# Berta GOLDSCHMIDT

26 Jan 1889 – 13 Jan 1942

Leo Goldschmidt's youngest sister, **Berta Goldschmidt**, was born on 26 Jan 1889 in Stolzenau. On 29 Mar 1930, in Berlin, at the age of 41, she married **Caesar Bernstein**. According to Max Goldschmidt (son of her first cousin Simon Goldschmidt) the marriage did not last long; she was divorced within a year. After her marriage dissolved she continued to be known by her married name, Berta Bernstein. We have no information about what happened to her ex-husband. Berta did not marry again, and resided in the Schöneberg district of Berlin. She did not emigrate.

This is all that is known about Berta's life before the Holocaust. She is recorded as one of the 1,034 Jews who were deported on the 8<sup>th</sup> Transport from Berlin to Riga, which departed on the 13 Jan 1942. The following excerpt from the Transport List shows Berta's name:

Transportliste													
Lfd. No.	N a m e	Vorname	geb. am	Ort	Beruf	ledig	verh.	Alter	arbeitsfähig	Wohnung	Strasse	Kontaktnr.	Kennzeichen
1	B I E S S	Ernst	15.7.79	Leipzig	Techn.	-	ja	63	ja	110, Schillerstr. 15		A 600 999	7080
2	Ellen geb. Infante	Elise	1.3.75	Leipzig	ohne	-	ja	67	ja	" "		-----	7080
3	Bernstein geb. Goldschmidt	Berta Sara	26.1.89	Stolzenau	ohne	ja	-	53	ja	110, Schillerstr. 15		A 600 200	7080
4	Ellen geb. Gotschke	Elise	1.10.79	Leipzig	ohne	ja	-	63	ja	110, Schillerstr. 15		A 600 000	7080
5	Trüber geb. Schramm	Josephine	21.1.80	Leipzig	ohne	ja	-	70	kein	110, Schillerstr. 107		-----	7080
6	Trüber	Antonia	2.11.80	Leipzig	Lehrerin	ja	-	60	ja	" "		-----	7080
7	Götsch	Leo Josef	26.1.79	Berlin	Techn.	-	ja	67	ja	" " 50		A 600 307	7081
8	Götsch geb. Singer	Roby	16.10.76	Berlin	Schneiderin	-	ja	66	ja	" "		A 600 300	7080
9	Hardegen geb. Wittich	Brigida	16.11.79	Berlin	Arbeiterin	ja	-	63	ja	110, Schillerstr. 10		A 600 400	7080

**Third line from the top: Bernstein geb. Goldschmidt, Berta Sara, b. 26 Jan 1889, Stolzenau, profession-none, single, age 53, able to work....**

From various sources one can piece together a picture of what probably happened to Berta during this deportation.

Berta's sister-in-law Betty Lahndt, who survived the war in Berlin, says the following in a letter she wrote on 2 Apr 1947 to Else Hirsch in South Africa:

*"I supported Ella and Berta up to the time they were deportrd. They were not in need - despite all prohibitions they continued to come to me. Both believed that they would be returning. Berta was already very ill. She surely did not survive the transport. I did not hear from them again. I don't think Semmy heard any more from his siblings either."*

A search on the internet for accounts of the transport from Berlin to Riga on 13 Jan 1942 produced the following letter from a survivor, Johanna Rosenthal (b. 29 Feb 1904) who was on the same train. She lived in Potsdam (close to Berlin) prior to her deportation. She wrote the following in June 1945:

*"Two days before our deportation we were ordered, by the Potsdam Gestapo to make a list of our belongings and we were expressly told that there was no reason to worry. On Thursday we were ordered to assemble at the Gestapo HQ the following morning at 8 o'clock. Two officials then saw us to our homes. When we arrived we were told that we would have to give up our apartments at once as a new home would be found for us in the East. Though we were allowed to pack, under guard, and take with us all the necessities of life, we never saw any of our possessions again. At 11 o'clock we were back at the Gestapo where they took all our money and papers. Then they put us in jail for two days. On Sunday, January 11, we were taken to Berlin in closed cars where we were to join a transport. Here we were searched again and even our food was taken from us. We met all the inhabitants of the old age home on Grosse Hamburger Strasse, as well as hospital patients whom the Gestapo had dragged out of their beds.*

*On Tuesday, January 13, we were dispatched to Riga, 1,200 of us in a packed, unheated train. Eating or drinking were the first things they taught us to do without, so we traveled for three days and three nights without a drop of any liquid, warm or cold. We arrived at Riga in the afternoon of Friday, January 16 where the temperature was minus forty. We were welcomed at the station with blows and howls from the German and Latvian S.S. All the luggage we had been allowed to keep such as rucksacks or briefcases had to be left behind. Those able to walk had to walk for four hours to reach our new home. Invalids, etc., were packed into cars but never arrived in the ghetto. We found the ghetto in an indescribable mess. At the beginning of December they had shot between 35,000 and 40,000 Latvian Jews there. Plates and pots full of food were still on the tables, showing how unexpectedly the massacre had been visited upon them.*

*We were the first transport from Berlin. Two more followed within the next 14 days. Those transports were even worse, because only cattle cars were used and almost only old people were deported. Some of the people went mad during the deportation and died en route."*

Other accounts of the transports from Berlin to Riga can be found on the internet, including video testimonies from other survivors. Johanna Rosenthal's letter above is the only one I have found that describes exactly the same train that Berta Goldschmidt took. It is noteworthy that this particular train used regular third-class passenger cars, not cattle cars. According to other records, the actual number of deportees was 1,034 men, women and children who mostly came from Berlin, but also 44 Jews from Potsdam. The average age of the deportees was 60, but there were also 15 children under 15 years of age. During the journey the Jews were guarded by a guard detail from the *Schutzpolizei* (police). The destination was not disclosed to the passengers, and after three days in overcrowded cars, they arrived on January 16 in severe frost at Skirotava station on the outskirts of Riga. After disembarking the train, they were informed that their luggage would be transferred to their future homes in the ghetto. The truth was that not all of them would arrive at the ghetto at all and

neither would their luggage. Some of the deportees were selected and suffocated in gas trucks or brought to the forest of Rumbula and shot.

I have given the date of Berta's death as 13 Jan 1942 because I want to believe what Betty Lahndt's wrote – that she did not survive the journey; that her suffering was not worse. However, I have no way of knowing whether she did or not. What she would have had to endure had she reached Riga is too distressing to imagine.

Of the 1,034 people who were deported to Riga on the 13 Jan 1942 transport, 1,017 are recorded as having perished there.

### **Historical Background**

In September 1941 Adolf Hitler approved plans for the mass deportation of Jews from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Luxembourg. The objective was to cleanse the Reich of Jews by re-settling them “in the East”. The deportations commenced in October 1941. The Wannsee Conference, where senior Nazis made the decision to carry out the Final Solution to their Jewish Problem by murdering all the Jews in Europe, took place later, on 20 Jan 1942.

The first wave of deportations from the Reich took place between October 15 and November 5, consisting of 20 transports with 19,593 Jews to Lodz in occupied Poland. The second wave began on November 8 and continued until early February 1942. This time, 32 transports with at least 32,000 Jews left the Reich for *Ostland* (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia) which had recently been conquered from Russia. Twenty of these transports went to Riga.

Prior to the arrival of these transports, the Nazis had established a ghetto in Riga that had been used to imprison nearly 30,000 Latvian Jews in crowded conditions. In anticipation of the incoming deportations from Germany, the local SS command carried out a large-scale murder operation to “make room” for the new arrivals. On November 30 and December 8, more than 27,500 Latvian Jews were shot in the nearby forest of Rumbula.

Regarding Jews from Berlin, representatives of the Jewish Community of Berlin were ordered by the Berlin Gestapo to compile lists of deportees. They were forced to choose several thousand names from their register. The Jewish Community was also required to take care of the deportees' basic food supplies and essentials for the journey. The only information provided was that the deportees would be re-settled “in the east”.

Approximately two weeks before the transport, the deportees received notification of their impending deportation with the usual instructions for evacuation, including a limited amount of luggage weighing up to 50 kg. They also received a form to declare their remaining property in detail. In many cases, Jews were brought to the assembly point by Gestapo personnel or by “marshals” - other Jews who were forced to assist in the deportation process. The Gestapo forced their way into the homes of those Jews whose names appeared on the deportation list and ensured that they were prepared to leave. The victims were given a few minutes to get ready and leave their homes forever. A truck collected the Jews on the street and after completing the roundup from other apartments took them to the assembly point which was set up in the synagogue at

Levetzowstrasse 7-8 in the Tiergarten district of Berlin. On arrival at the synagogue grounds, which was supervised by German policemen, the Jews underwent a registration process which was often violent. The Gestapo forced them to declare their property and hand over the keys to their homes. Then they had to sign a document confirming that they transferred everything to the State. They were also forced to hand over all valuables and cash. Sometimes more than 1,000 people were stranded for days at the site awaiting deportation. They would sleep on the floor or on bags filled with straw. The sanitary conditions were terrible. Doctors and nurses did all they could to help, but some people suffered nervous breakdowns and a few even committed suicide. All Jewish property was sold by the Gestapo after the transport left.

Name	B e r n s t e i n		
First Names	B e r t a	Maiden Name	G o l d s c h m i d t
Date of Birth	26.1.89	Place of Birth	S t o l s e n a u
Last known Address	B e r l i n W 30, R o s e n h e i m e r S t r. 34 I		
Information	A E. : 05205-VIII/5454 P II Verv.		
	13.1.42 - Riga		

**Record card from Arolsen Archive**